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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the extent to which epideictic speaking is treated in communication skills courses in the discipline. Noting that the genre receives little emphasis in textbooks and basic courses in the field, the paper questions whether students are being optimally served by current pedagogical practices. The paper first summarizes traditional theoretical frameworks relevant to epideictic discourse, then examines contemporary curricular attention in this area, and finally offers suggestions for the direction that might be followed to more fully develop the role for epideictic speaking. The results of an informal electronic survey show that those educators who responded seemed equally divided in terms of practice between actually assigning an epideictic speech and general instruction (making students aware of the genre and its rhetorical/historical significance). Certain ways of presenting and approaching epideictic can maximize student involvement and interest in the topic--the overall intent would be to enlighten students about the prevalence of the kinds of events they regularly experience that reflect the criteria established for what counts as epideictic. In discussing the degree of emphasis given epideictic by 12 popular public speaking textbooks, the paper finds that, without exception, epideictic issues were among the last to be addressed. The paper concludes that, since the prevalence of epideictic events in life is inescapable, more should be done to emphasize epideictic as a public speaking genre. (A list of textbooks examined is appended.) (CR)

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A Pedagogic Examination and Evaluation of the Status of Epideictic Speaking in Public Speaking Curricula

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This paper attempts to determine the extent to which Epideictic speaking is treated in communication skills courses in the discipline. We were interested in exploring this topic because we have noticed over the years that this genre seems to receive little emphasis in textbooks and basic courses in the field. Given the fact that Aristotle treated Epideictic as a full and equal genre to forensic and deliberative rhetoric, we were concerned about whether our students were being optimally served by current practices.

Of additional concern is anecdotal evidence perceived by one of the authors who has been actively engaged in consulting in more than one area of the country. Individuals who seek his services more often than not do so because they have a role to play in some special event, awards dinner, retirement dinner, or so forth, and need information about how to prepare an appropriate speech. This appears to support the notion that even professional people lack preparation for Epideictic speaking. Therefore, it is our contention that the role of Epideictic speaking deserves serious examination and consideration by the community of communication scholars. To that end, in this paper we first briefly summarize traditional theoretical frameworks

relevant to Epideictic discourse; second, we examine contemporary curricular attention in this area; and, finally, we offer suggestions for the direction that we might go in order to more fully develop the role of Epideictic speaking.

Theoretical Frameworks

To establish a case for the pedagogical value of instruction in Epideictic speaking we first examine briefly prominent classical and contemporary outlines of Epideictic. The distinguishing features of Epideictic as presented theoretically set the experience of Epideictic apart from the experience of planning and presenting standard informative and persuasive presentations. We stress the distinct *experience* of Epideictic as requiring the appropriate understanding of its context, as laid out by Aristotle and others, for pedagogical success.

In reviewing Aristotle's rubrics for Epideictic speaking for this paper, several items struck us anew. As we all know, Aristotle sets Epideictic apart from political and forensic speaking in terms of time, content and purpose: time-present; content-praise and blame; purpose-honor and dishonor. Chapter Nine of the first book of the *Rhetoric* is devoted to an eloquent elaboration of these rubrics. Roberts's translation reads almost as if Aristotle were *demonstrating* a peculiarly Epideictic style even while discussing it. Aristotle seems to be asking his

students to listen to him celebrate the magnificence of virtue, nobility of spirit, honor and courage in the words of his discourse themselves. To this end he deliberately stresses throughout the positive poles of his content and purpose distinctions: Epideictic oratory in praise of virtue intended to bring honor to the person or event under discussion. In fact, it is well known to readers of the *Rhetoric* that at the conclusion of I.9, Aristotle dismisses censure and dishonor offhandedly by telling us now that we know how to bring praise and honor, we can just take the opposite characteristics to bring censure and dishonor (characteristics also cursorily mentioned throughout the relevant text).

Another point strikes us as worthy of remark with regard to the rubric of time. In an Epideictic experience argument is not carried out over issues to decide future action or the truth of events in the past, but is devoted to making the case for the worthiness of praise and honor in the present. To this end there must be sufficient *quantity* of virtue to demonstrate the honor of the subject; hence, the strategy of amplification dominates. And, although Epideictic celebrates the present, it *commemorates* and *memorializes*, and worthiness of honor can be judged on the basis of worthiness of memory:

Things that deserve to be remembered are noble, and the

more they deserve this, the nobler they are. So are the things that continue even after death; those which are always attended by honour; those which are exceptional; and those which are possessed by one person alone--these last are more readily remembered than others (I.9.1367a.21-25).

Finally, Aristotle continually recognizes the simultaneous need to draw distinctions but also to recognize some fluidity among them. While Epideictic is indeed a different species from its forensic and deliberative counterparts, Aristotle clearly points to the value of Epideictic for socialization of individuals and groups, for confirmation of praiseworthy virtues or acts, as well as for condemnation and denouncement of their opposites. Thus Epideictic functions as an overarching *critical* activity of clarifying and transmitting cultural values.

In contemporary scholarship, Rosenfield has elaborated on these themes in his work on Epideictic and the role it plays in instigating civic virtues in modern societies. The idea of putting a positive "spin" on the pejorative "rhetoric of display" is important. What is *displayed* is an articulation of what we revere and wish to retain as a civil society, not an empty ceremonial act or skill of the speaker.

Rosenfield's emphasis on the civic functions of Epideictic

lead to two observations of pedagogical import: first, the process of instilling in today's students a sense of ceremony, formality, decorum, and so forth. At Salisbury State, for instance, the Career Services staff recently sponsored a dinner representing a typical interview situation for job-seeking seniors. The local news broadcast story included a quick-cut montage of a half-dozen students expressing concern over which fork to use for which course. I am sure all of us have cringed from time to time as we survey a new crop of students, many attired in various versions of "grunge" and "gimme caps." While some of our students have had the benefit of parental training, experience in situations requiring some ceremony and formality such as banquets, weddings and funerals, many have not and may be totally unprepared.

Second, Epideictic experiences supplement the primarily vocational emphasis in informative and persuasive speaking. In addition to its own often hidden vocational worthiness, training in Epideictic speaking, especially from the perspectives discussed here, enlarges the experience to aspects of life, encompassing citizenship and service, markers of life events and transitions, and experience of community that provide a unique context for public expression.

Having thus established the academic and civic value of

Epideictic training, we turn our attention to the extent to which the issue receives focus in contemporary communication classrooms. The next section reports results of analysis of current pedagogical practices in this area as suggested by an informal survey of colleagues and public speaking texts.

Our rationale for the sources of data used in this analysis was our belief that two important questions about Epideictic speaking could be answered: (1) What are the tendencies in the instruction and application of Epideictic speaking in the contemporary communication skills classroom? (2) To what extent does Epideictic speaking receive emphasis when compared to other types of public speaking training (IE., informative and persuasive speaking)?

The Survey

Our informal survey of colleagues was conducted electronically via a post on the Communication Research and Theory Network (CRTNET). The questions we posted to the network were as follows: (1) Do you include any coverage of Epideictic speaking in the basic course for public speaking? In the advanced course? Is the course for majors and/or a general education requirement? (2) If you do not include Epideictic speaking, why not? If you had time, would you include it? (3) If you include Epideictic speaking assignments, what kinds of

things do you do in your classrooms?

The survey revealed a variety of instructional practices in the area of Epideictic speaking. Overall, there are two approaches: the practice of Epideictic speaking, and the analysis of Epideictic speaking. In the practice of Epideictic speaking, there was ample evidence of "traditional" Epideictic speaking assignments. Examples include eulogies, tributes, and award presentations/acceptances. Interestingly, colleagues in the field reported on some innovative, contemporary applications of Epideictic speaking. Examples include a speech to an unborn child, an after dinner speech delivered at a special occasion off campus, and a speech affirming/celebrating one's values. One unique assignment required students to take the text of a "famous" Epideictic speech and create a computer-generated presentation about it (via a program like power point for example).

Another choice often made by colleagues is to inform their classes about the Epideictic tradition, via lecture or rhetorical analysis, but not actually require an evaluated presentation from that genre. The contexts in which the issue is addressed vary from presidential rhetoric to significant speeches in American history. Some colleagues indicated the teaching value of the subject of epideictic itself. The genre can serve as a

transition from informative speaking to persuasive speaking. Additionally, it was reported that Epideictic speaking provides excellent examples of questions of value in public address. Overall, then, while Epideictic speaking is not consistently taught as a skill per se, it seems consistently offered as an important topic in the study of public communication.

The survey also offered us an opportunity to address the degree of emphasis given to Epideictic speaking in the instruction of public speaking. As previously indicated, those who responded to our CRTNET post seemed equally divided in terms of practice (IE., actually assigning an Epideictic speech) vs. general instruction (making students aware of the genre and its rhetorical/historical significance). Having determined that, we attempted to infer how much the practice and/or understanding of Epideictic speaking "counted" in the course. Our general impression was that, for those who assigned Epideictic speeches, they counted for less of the overall grade than other kinds of speeches. Our impression was supported by the number of colleagues who spoke of Epideictic as a "unit" that they covered. Additionally, the fact that several colleagues found the topic worthy enough to talk about, but not to formally assign, also bolstered our impression. A caveat seems important at this juncture. We did not specifically ask how much time was spent on

Epideictic speaking as compared to other types. Further, we did not ask about grading procedures for those who did include an Epideictic assignment. Perhaps we should have asked those questions. While our impression is that Epideictic appears to play a minor role, we were encouraged by those who reported this kind of speech is a capstone assignment or that it is used to serve as a pedagogical bridge from informative to persuasive speaking.

Further evidence for our contention of the seemingly "minor" role that Epideictic plays in our curricula arose when we considered the types of courses our colleagues reported as the context in which they address the issue. While some colleagues cover Epideictic in a basic, university-wide required communication skills class, there seems to be more attention to it in upper division courses taken primarily by communication majors. That distinction begs the following questions: What student population is getting exposure to Epideictic speaking? Are there students not getting the exposure that should be? Finally, for those students who are exposed to Epideictic speaking, what should be the nature of their exposure to it (applied or theoretical/analytical)?

We acknowledge these questions as significant and our answers, tentative at best. Having qualified thus, we assert

that a limited population is exposed to Epideictic speaking, the upper-division communication major. One might reasonably argue that this circumstance is appropriate. Epideictic speaking requires rhetorical ability that is perhaps beyond the scope of the non-major in an introductory communication class. On the other hand, if most universities have identified oral communication skills as part and parcel of one's general education, and we exclude or de-emphasize Epideictic speaking in that context, are we saying that one's communication training is complete without it? We are not so naive as to assume that one course gives students everything they need. However, we raise the question as to whether or not Epideictic speaking should be a more consistent part of the average student's training.

As to the issue of focusing on the upper-division communication student in this context, we invite (incite perhaps?) another debate. Upper division courses tend to be reserved as those with theoretical/analytical focus. Indeed, our CRTNET survey revealed a consistent use of Epideictic speaking for the purpose of knowledge about, rather than the practice of, it. We do not dispute the value of theoretical analysis and rhetorical criticism. It seems to us, however, that if we focus on a limited population of students, should we not be certain that their education relative to Epideictic speaking is applied

as well as theoretical?

Textbook Analysis

Our final area of analysis relative to the degree of emphasis focused on the extent to which public speaking textbooks highlighted Epideictic speaking. We examined 12 public speaking textbooks. At the low end, the coverage of Epideictic speaking ranged from none at all (in one text only) to a text in which the topic was addressed only in an appendix. At the high end, coverage was 27 pages. The average length of the texts examined was 250 pages. In consideration of the coverage of Epideictic overall, the coverage was at approximately 16 pages, or slightly more than 6% of the average public speaking text.

While some might argue that, given the number of issues requiring attention in a public speaking class, the number cited above are justifiable. We raise the question of whether the distribution is appropriate given the nature and types of speeches that Epideictic speaking comprises. Further, without exception, Epideictic issues were among the last to be addressed in each text. Additionally, the coverage was typically limited to a brei explanation to the general nature of each type of special occasion. There was little if any discussion of how to organize, construct, or deliver the speech. We contend that such an approach assumes that the skills offered early in those texts

about informative and persuasive speaking are directly applicable to special occasion speaking. It occurs to us that the community of scholars in public speaking has accepted this approach without question. We simply ask, should we?

If the answer to the question is negative, the remainder of this paper attempts to explore ways in which instructors can incorporate assignments in Epideictic speaking in public speaking courses.

Strategies for Teaching Epideictic

This section of the study discusses ways of presenting and approaching Epideictic experiences in order to maximize student involvement and interest in the topic. The overall pedagogical intent is to enlighten students about the prevalence of the kinds of events they regularly experience, or will experience, that reflect the criteria established for what counts as Epideictic. One of the authors uses a broadly ranging approach to include discussions of events students otherwise probably would take for granted.

Categories of Epideictic experiences discussed include ceremonies; meals; markers of life experiences such as anniversaries, commencements, retirements; celebrations of persons, events, places; reunions; civic functions; ground breakings; grand openings; awards presentations. Granted, some

of these categories overlap each other, but the sheer number of such events occurring every day warrants notice.

Students can relate readily to an understanding of Epideictic experiences in contexts interesting to them. In a public speaking class last year, one of the authors found the students really sat up and took notice upon viewing a videotape of the celebration of Cal Ripken's surpassing of Lou Gehrig's record of consecutive starts. The world of sports itself provides rich material for enhancing student interest. This year, for instance, the baseball season is dedicated to remembering that fifty years ago Jackie Robinson first took the field in the major leagues. Dean Smith surpassed Adolph Rupp in all time NCAA wins. The NBA is celebrating its fiftieth season. Many more examples could be mentioned from the sports world alone.

Given the proximity of Salisbury State to Washington, DC, gives us the opportunity to consider taking a class field trip for students to tour the memorials and monuments in that city as a way of seeing the act of memorializing as an Epideictic event, and perhaps giving speeches or completing writing assignments about the experience. Assignments could be given for students to research the histories of their institution for speeches about key events to be commemorated, or research on their own ancestors

or family members who would be interesting subjects for tribute.

One of the authors has on two occasions used an Epideictic event as a "capstone" to the course by, upon negotiation with the class, scheduling a class banquet at the end of the term. Students took responsibility for organizing the event, planning the program, and giving awards. Each student in the class received some kind of award and acknowledged it by giving an impromptu acceptance speech, while other students took responsibility for the awards presentation speeches. One student served as Emcee for the event, and the instructor gave the keynote address.

Strategies such as these, along with some of the ideas mentioned earlier from colleagues, are available, and can make the study of Epideictic speaking both meaningful and enjoyable for students. The prevalence of Epideictic events in the life of a member of a community, family, and profession is inescapable. We believe that we could do more to balance the three-legged stool Aristotle presents us, and do so in some creative ways.

APPENDIX
Public Speaking Texts Examined

Axon, D.E. and Stine, R.L. (1993). The public speaking process: Computer-assisted speech organization and development. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt, Brace.

Ayres, J. and Miller, J. (1994). Effective public speaking (4th ed.). Dubuque, IA: Brown and Benchmark.

Brydon, S.R. and Scott, M.D. (1997). Between one and many: The art and science of public speaking (2nd ed). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

DeVito, J.A. (1997). The elements of public speaking (6th ed.). New York: Longman.

Gronbeck, B.E., McKerrow, R.E., Ehninger, D., and Monroe, A.H. (1997). Principles and types of speech communication (13th ed.). New York: Longman.

Hanna, M.S. and Gibson, J.W. (1995). Public speaking for personal success (4th ed.). Dubuque,IA: Brown and Benchmark.

Harte, T.B., Keefe, C. and Derryberry, B.R. (1992). The complete book of speechwriting for students and professionals. Edina, MN: Burgess International Group.

Hauer, N. and Martley, E. (1993). The practical speech handbook. Homewood, IL: Irwin Mirror Press.

Makay, J. (1992). Public speaking: Theory into practice. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt, Brace.

Powers, J.H. (1994). Public speaking: The lively art. New York: HarperCollins.

Sprague, J. and Stuart, D. (1996). The speaker's handbook (4th ed.). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt, Brace.

Sproule, J.M. (1997). Speechmaking: Rhetorical competence in a postmodern world (2nd ed.). Dubuque, IA: Brown and Benchmark.

Zarefsky. D. (1996). Public speaking: Strategies for success. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.